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TAGS: [ECPS](#) [ECIN](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [AE](#)  
SUBJECT: UAE TELECOM UPDATES

REF: ABU DHABI 00046

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On April 19, econoff met with Mohammed Gheyath, Technical Affairs Manager of the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA), to discuss UAE telecom initiatives. Gheyath said the TRA is planning to allow a third internet service provider (ISP) in the UAE and is also considering approving the use of voice over internet protocol (VOIP). When pressed on a likely date of inception for a third ISP as well as VOIP services, Gheyath said he expects the new services "shortly." Econoff asked about the recently announced second telecom company, Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company (EITC). Gheyath said the TRA has granted a license to EITC and the company can begin business whenever it is ready, probably this summer. Gheyath also said all companies covered by the new company, including those in the free zones, will likely be regulated by the TRA. End summary.

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TRA considers allowing a third ISP as well as VOIP  
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¶2. (SBU) Mohammed Gheyath, Technical Affairs Manager of the TRA, told econoff the TRA is considering allowing a third ISP to meet the growing demand for internet services in the UAE. Although the TRA is likely to approve a license for a third ISP, it is not considering offering more telecom licenses. Currently, there are only two telecom operators in the UAE, Etisalat (Emirates Telecommunication Corporation), which has been in business for over thirty years and the recently announced EITC, which is expected to begin business this summer. (Note: Currently, government owned Etisalat provides services to virtually all of the UAE --with the exception of some free zones-- and the federal government derives a significant source of revenue from the company. Etisalat is expanding its services to other countries as well. The UAEG also has a stake in EITC, originally owning 50%, but later divesting itself of some shares. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) Gheyath said that the TRA is expected to approve VOIP services, but the TRA first needs to make sure that the necessary infrastructure is in place. Gheyath explained that the current electricity infrastructure in the UAE needs to be improved to ensure that VOIP will work properly. He also said that there are concerns about using VOIP to call emergency services (999) in the UAE since emergency operators cannot pinpoint a caller's location if the call is made with VOIP. (Comment: Commercially available VOIP services -- such as Vonage and Skype -- work without problems in the UAE. However, the TRA currently blocks the downloading of VOIP programs, such as Skype. The government has closed entities selling VOIP as a commercial service. End comment.)

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TRA looking at ways to reduce "censorship"  
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14. (SBU) Econoff asked Gheyath about how the second telecom company, EITC, would be "censored" and whether it would be subject to the same regulations as government owned Etisalat.

(Note. TECOM, which is part of EITC, currently provides uncensored internet access to some of the free zones in Dubai. End note.) Gheyath said he prefers to use the word "regulate" instead of "censor." He explained that the TRA is studying the way it regulates internet companies. Currently, a committee -- made up of two members of the Abu Dhabi government, two members of the Dubai government and two members from the private sector -- is studying ways to regulate all areas, including the free zones. Gheyath also said that the revised regulations "would be more in line with U.S. laws, i.e., restricting only pornography and criminal activities."

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